
A
S E R M O N

Preached before the

Q U E E N

At Whitehall, May xiv. 1693.

SEBASTIAN

OF THE

REPUBLIC OF THE UNITED STATES

A
S E R M O N

Preached before the

Q U E E N,

A T

W H I T E - H A L L,

MAY the xivth, 1693.

The Fourth Sunday after *Easter*.

By *GEORGE STANHOPE*,
Vicar of *Lewisham* in *Kent*; And late
Fellow of *King's-Colledge* in *Cambridge*.

Published by Her Majesties Special Command.

L O N D O N :

Printed for *S. Smith*, and *B. Walford*, at the *Prince's*
Arms in *St. Paul's Church-yard*, 1693.

NOVEMBER

1871

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

A
S E R M O N

Preached before the

Q U E E N

At Whitehall, May xiv. 1693.

St. MATTH. xix. Ver. xvii.

---If thou wilt enter into Life, keep the Commandments.

MY Text is a part of that very remarkable Passage between our Saviour and the Rich Young-man in the Gospel, of whom the Sixteenth Verse gives an account, that he accosted our Lord with this most important

tant Question, *Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may inherit Eternal Life?* Which compendious Enquiry our Lord satisfies here, with as comprehensive an Answer; *If thou wilt enter into Life, keep the Commandments.*

From which words I shall not make it my business to argue the necessity of Good Works in general; for, alas! how very few of the men that lead wicked Lives do it upon a perswasion that they are under no Obligations to the contrary? But, because Mistakes in the nature of our Duty, and an Imagination, that the Commands of God are more easily satisfied than really they are, do commonly betray People to infinite Follies and Dangers; I shall endeavour to possess you with a just and powerful sense of that Obedience which is made in my Text the Condition of *entering into Life.* And in order to this I shall shew,

- I. The true Nature and just Extent of a Christian's Obedience to God's Commandments. And,

II. The

II. The Necessity of it, and the Reasonableness of this being made the Condition of our attaining to Life and Happiness.

I. *First*, As to the Nature and just Extent of our Obedience, it implies, and requires these four Qualifications.

1. First, That a man apply himself sincerely to keep *All* God's Commandments.

2. Secondly, That he observe them in their true perfection, and that more spiritual and refined sense, to which Christianity hath now exalted them.

3. Thirdly, That it be done upon a Religious Principle, and for this Consideration, That they are the Commands of God.

4. Fourthly, That he persevere in keeping them, and (as our Vow in Baptism expresses it) *walk in the same all the days of his Life*.

These are the Measures of a true Christian Obedience ; and though we may not presume so to limit God's Mercies, as absolutely to shut out all that come not up to

these heights, yet it is no less presumption, but perhaps a more dangerous one, to stretch those Mercies beyond the Standard of the Gospel. Whatever is more than this, is an act of God's Supreme Dispensing Prerogative, an Indulgence that he hath no where obliged himself to, and consequently, that no man can safely depend upon. For, as the Collect for this day instructs us very well, *the loving that which he commands*, and loving it so, as constantly to keep and live by it, is the only sure way to *obtain what he hath promised*.

II. And therefore, as to what regards my second part, which pretends to prove the Necessity of this Obedience, and the Fitness of its being made the Condition of Happiness to us, I shall not treat of that separately, and by it self, but beg Leave to apply it to every Branch of the former Head distinctly, that so it may appear, that I have in no particular made a too rigorous Interpretation of our Duty: And because *entring into Life* in the Text is capable of a double sence, either becoming a *Disciple* of Christ, which is the way to Life, or enjoying Everlasting Happiness,

ness, which is the Reward of that *Discipleship*, and the End of that Way ; I shall endeavour to prove, that nothing short of what has been proposed, can either make good the Covenant of the *Gospel*, as it stands charged upon us here, or qualifie us for inheriting the Kingdom of Heaven hereafter.

1. First then, I say, One necessary Qualification of a Christian's Obedience is, that he apply himself sincerely to keep *all* God's Commandments. There is no man so lost to Reason and Virtue, but he finds it for his purpose to observe some of them : Natural Modesty, and the preservation of one's self, and the promoting an Interest with others, perswade the practise of many commendable things. Sicknes and Poverty, and publick Punishments, and the Reproach of the World, restrain Men from gratifying many corrupt Inclinations. The Fear of God too will have some Check upon the Conscience, and enforce the other Considerations more powerfully. And these Impressions people that make any Pretensions at all to Goodness, are pretty well content to submit to, in many, if not in most matters. But still, if there

there be any one Reserved Case, any Favourite-Corruption, upon which Religion exercises its Powers but feebly : But one though it be, that continues Proof against all the Charms, and all the Terrors of the Gospel, that single Exception is a Blemish to the whole, and renders all the rest of a good Life of no effect, though one should labour never so zealously in other instances, to please God, and save ones own Soul.

The Mischief and Danger of such beloved Lusts is so much the greater, because men are apt to flatter themselves with a vain hope, that a few Spots will be easily overlook'd in the Crowd of good Actions, which give a Grace and Beauty to their Lives. They think it hard the Reward of many Vertues should be lost for the sake of one Vice, and seem to fancy, that Almighty God will admit them to compound with him, and buy off one Commandment with the satisfying of another. This is very legible in their Behaviour, tho' they are asham'd to speak it out : And therefore I shall now endeavour to undeceive all favourable Opinions of such a partial Obedience, by considering the necessity

cessity of applying our selves sincerely to keep *All* God's Commandments, as ever we hope to enter into Life.

1. And First, We cannot enter into it, as that signifies undertaking the Gospel-Covenant, faithfully and effectually, without such an universal Obedience. The Young-man before us had observ'd and continued long in many excellent Duties, and yet upon the refusal of one propos'd to him afresh, he was rejected, as unqualified for a Follower of Christ. The Good actions of his Life past were by no means lost upon our Saviour, for St. Mark acquaints us, that *Jesus beholding* Mark x. 21. *him, loved him.* But still there was a Canker at the bottom, a Spirit of Covetousness and Love of the World, which could by no means digest that hard Saying, *Go sell that thou hast, and give to the Poor.* This made him an eminent, but a most unhappy instance of what we often find our Great Master taking such pains to inculcate, and particularly, (Luke xiv. 33.) *Whosoever he be of you, that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my Disciple.* The short of which, and of all other Texts of the like nature, is this; That our Lord

Lord will never endure we should set up any Separate or Contending Interests against Him. If we pretend to be His, he expects to have us entire, and without a Rival. And this Integrity of ours must be manifested, by sacrificing *All*, even our dearest Inclinations; by foregoing *All*, even our most engaging Interests, whenever *Providence* orders matters so, that these come in competition with Him, and His Commands and our Obedience and They can no longer stand together.

2. The same is necessary, Secondly, in order to our obtaining Eternal Happiness; for, since the Law was establish'd with a *Curse* upon every one that continueth not in all things written there, to do them, this cuts off all Hopes of Heaven, when grounded upon such an Obedience, as shall presume to dispense with any particular Precept contained in it. And, altho' we are taught, that the Gospel was intended to soften and abate the Rigor of the Law, yet will not that do us any Service at all in the present Case. It makes a sure provision indeed for Forgiveness upon Repentance; it treats us gently, and uses great tenderness to the Infirmities of Hu-

Human Nature, to which the Law shew'd little or no compassion ; but it gives no man Licenſe to transgreſs wilfully, nor preaches up the leaſt Indulgence to any known Sin : And therefore in this reſpect the Curſe continues ſtill in full force ; and St. James hath proved it muſt needs do ſo, by that remarkable Paſſage of his Epistle, (Ch. ii. V. 10, 11.) *Whoſoever ſhall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that ſaid, Do not commit Adultery, ſaid alſo, Do not kill : Now if thou commit no Adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a Tranſgreſſor of the Law.*

Men may flatter themſelves, and impoſe upon others with I know not what imaginary Notions of *Mortal* and *Venial* Sins ; and it is very pleaſant to obſerve how the Doctors of that Church, which maintains theſe Diſtinctions, ſhift and double, to deliver themſelves from this Text. But the Apoſtle evidently ſhews, that the Authority of the Law-giver is that which binds the Law upon us ; that the Contempt of that Authority is the thing to be accounted for ; and if that be once violated, it matters very little whether it be done

in this or that particular instance ; for, tho' some Crimes be more heinous, and some less so, yet mens Obedience or Disobedience is not to be measured so much by the quality of their Actions, as by their Regard or Disregard to the Will of their Superiors. And since our Lord's Pleasure is signified by *all* his Laws, it is sufficient to condemn us, that we wilfully neglect *any*. And therefore it becomes us to look upon every Command as armed with Thunder, not to receive God's Laws nicely and humourfully, just as our Palates stand to them, but to consider our selves in a state of absolute Subjection, at no liberty to chuse our own Terms, but oblig'd to take them together as they lye, and submit to all that is set before us.

The practical Reflections which naturally flow from this first Head, among others, are such as these : That men may arrive at great degrees of Justice and common Honesty, and yet not come up to the Character of *Good Christians* : That those are false Measures, and most unfaithful Comforts, by which we use to support our selves, upon the account of not being grossly and scandalously wicked :
That

That it is an easie and a very common thing, to deceive not only the World, but our own Souls too, with zealous Inclinations and fair Appearances of Holiness : And, that the great, the only Tryal of a Man is, when his Darling Bosom-Vice comes to be encountered. This is the tender part, which so seldom endures to be touched. Against This we very hardly admit any Reproof, but soften and accommodate every Argument to its advantage : And though we may be in other cases disposed to a ready complaine, are yet apt to hold this fast at any rate ; and ever pleading *Naaman's Exemptions*, *In one thing the Lord pardon thy Servant*. And yet, as oft as Men do thus turn their own Carvers, when they pick and parcel out their Duty, stick to one part, and throw away the rest ; That this is the ready course to destroy all the power of Christianity upon their Consciences, and to distinguish themselves at last into the Pit of Hell.

II. *Secondly*, A Man keeps the Commandments as he ought, only then, when he keeps them in their true perfection, and that more spiritual refined sence, to which Christianity

hath exalted them.. To this purpose some understand the place before us, as if the Young-man quite mistook the nature of the Commands, who so confidently profess himself a constant Observer of them, and yet was found wanting in that Great Duty of Charity, which is the very Life and Substance of the whole Law. And therefore our Lord, to rectifie his Error, proposes such a Condition to him, as might intimate, that no man hath in truth kept those Commandments, who is not in a continual disposition to do all the Good he can : Not to reproach Human Nature, nor be a Scandal to the Character Men bear, or the Religion they profess. To abstain from gross Evils and palpable Injustice, might pass for some sort of Excellence under a more imperfect Dispensation ; but with Christians it seems this ought to be esteem'd a very small thing. It is expected they should improve the Rules of Living, and by becoming bright Examples of Virtue and Goodness, *adorn the Doctrine of Christ in all things*, and reflect Honour back again upon God, and their most holy Profession.

Thus

Thus much is undeniably to be gathered from our Saviour's Sermon on the Mount, from several of his Discourses with the *Pharisees*, and more particularly from his summing up our whole *Duty*, in those two comprehensive Virtues, the *loving God with all our Hearts*, and *our Neighbour as our selves*. For Love is a generous Principle, and never grudges its Favours, or distributes its Services sparingly, but strives continually to do more and more, and thinks the most that can be done, little enough. And the want of this it is, that makes Men so niggardly in point of Duty, so careful to stick to the very Letter of the Command, as if they were driving a hard Bargain with Almighty God, and thought it their Wisdom, to be as sharp in point of exchange, and to purchase Heaven as cheap as possibly they can. Too many of us read our Bibles, as some crafty People do the Statute-book, with a design not to do as much, but as little of their Duty, as may be. They learn to cavil, and play subtilly upon Words and Forms, and instruct themselves chiefly where the Penalties lye, to see how far they may be disobedient and troublesome,

blesome, without falling under the lash of the Law. When therefore we have considered of what Reputation such a pretended Honesty ought to be among Men; we cannot but discern, how such a kind of Christianity is like to be accepted by the Great Searcher of Hearts; and how far They fall short of a True Gospel-Obedience, who are always afraid of being over-reach'd, and paying God more than his strict due, and take Sanctuary in the words of the Command, without a just regard had to the purpose and perfection of it.

And what Success such men must look for as to their Eternal Recompence, our Lord's Account of the Last Judgment abundantly informs us. We read in the xxvth of *St. Matthew*, that feeding the Hungry, clothing the Naked, and other good Offices to the Miserable and Indigent, are the things upon which all our Fates must turn at that Great day. And if this be the Issue Men shall be concluded by, then it is most evident, that our Obedience is required, according to the most exalted and spiritual Sense of the Law; for those Duties are no part of the

the Letter of it, nor any otherwise enjoined in the Ten Commandments, than as Charity, which is the end of the Commandment, obliges us to become useful and beneficial, and to lay out our selves, and all our powers liberally for the Honour of God, and the Benefit of Mankind.

And now give me leave to put you in mind, that this Second Head presents all *You*, to whom the Providence of God hath given *Prosperity* and *Power* to do good, with a true state of your own Case, and directs you how to make a sure tryal of the Sincerity of your Hearts, and the ground of your Hopes for the next World. That your Honours are not the Reward of Iniquity, nor your Riches the price of Oppression and Extortion, are very comfortable Reflections indeed; and it were much to be wished, that every great and wealthy man could apply them to himself. But yet the Ruler in the Gospel seems to have had a Title to all these Comforts, and still you see he was not thought fit either for Christianity or Heaven. There is another most important Enquiry behind about these matters, not only by what methods

rhods they have been got, but in what manner they are employed. The Orphans and Widows may cry for Redress, and they may cry for Relief too, and we must not stop our Ears to their Wants, any more than their Injuries : The Tears of the Distressed should never fall in vain, for if we owe them no Satisfaction, yet Mercy and Compassion we do ; and no man is so much Proprietor of what he calls his own, that he can without Sin and Injustice shut up his Bowels from them that have need. If we will pursue our Duty to its just heights, to be Useless and Unprofitable in the World, is to cease to be Innocent. Our Virtue consists not so much in doing no Ill, as in doing abundance of Good ; in enlarging our Hearts, and opening our Hands ; in making the best of our Station in the World, that is, in dedicating our Selves and Services entirely to God, and becoming Ornaments to Religion, and Blessings to one another, as illustrious and diffusive, as our Condition and Opportunities will suffer us to be.

Such is the Nature, such the Necessity of the Second Qualification required in our Obe-

Obedience ; all which is yet more strongly enforced by that which follows in the third place.

III. That a Man keep the Commandments out of a Religious Principle, and upon this Consideration, That they are the Commands of God.

The Motives upon which any thing is done are of so great importance, that there can be no just distinctions between Virtue and Vice without them. These are the Springs that set the Engine first on work, and the Rules of Mechanism hold thus far in Morals as well as Nature, that unless They be regular, all the Motions from them must needs be vicious and exorbitant. A man may be liberal to the Poor out of Charity, and he may be so out of Ostentation too : He may be temperate in Obedience to some Natural Antipathies, or to favour a weak Constitution : He may be Just for Reputation, Frugal and Diligent for the sake of Wealth, or Devout to be seen of Men. And how highly soever these persons may deserve to be commended for their Prudence, yet sure all this will amount to but very little

the Religion ; for, that is in truth only then, when we govern our selves by the Love of God, and the Equity of his Laws ; not by Rules of Worldly Wisdom, and little indirect Ends propos'd from a Holy Life, which would be no better than Trick and Pretence at the bottom, and not so properly the serving God, as our selves. In such cases, our Actions resemble Goodly Children born of Ungracious Parents, which sometimes prove useful and excellent Persons themselves, tho' their Descent were but scandalous or mean ; for thus the Vain-glorious man's Distributions are not the less beneficial to the World that partakes of them, however that ill Principle may lose all the Merit to the person that makes them. And so the same thing in two several men may not be the same ; for, tho' in the matter it self, and all its outward appearances, there be no difference, yet in the disposition of the Mind, and the Cause from whence it proceeds, there may be a very great one ; so great, that what is really Virtue in one man, shall be no better than Vice in another. Of such consequence it is to distinguish things by the Principles that give them
them

them birth, and the Ends to which they are directed ; for otherwise we shall confound true Goodness, with that which is but the Shadow and Counterfeit Face of it, and overlook that best Recommendation, which is peculiar and essential to the Obedience of Faith: For, that this of observing the Commandments out of a Religious Regard to God, is so, we cannot in reason doubt, when it is farther consider'd, That no other Principle can make good the Covenant of the Gospel here, nor give a man any Title to a Reward hereafter.

1. *First*, No other Principle can enable a man to make good the Covenant of the Gospel here ; for that undertakes for a steady Piety, which requires a fixt and steady Cause ; and such is none, besides this I am treating of. It was not only a just and a noble Thought, but the most pertinent Preface the Roman Orator could use, to shew the Consequence of his Book upon the Nature of the Gods : *Haec scio an Pietate adversus Deos sublatà, fides etiam, & Societas humani generis, & unà etiam excellentissima virtus, Justitia tollatur.* Politicians might

pretend to chain and fetter Men up by Laws, but the very Heathens could discover that these were Fences easily broke through; and that if any Restraint could hold our unruly Passions, it must be a constant awful sense of the Divine Nature. Thus it ever was, and thus it must needs be; for, the man that is just purely for Interest, how shall we secure his Fidelity when the Condition of his Affairs happens to change? For, if at any time it may prove for his advantage to be unjust, the same Principle will then carry him to Vice, as powerfully as now it engages him in the contrary. Reputation and Sense of Shame, it is plain, can only have influence in matters that come to publick Knowledge, and will be no Bar at all to Sins so private, as not to be discovered; nor to persons so great, or so confirmed in Wickedness, as not to fear Reproach. The men that are carried on by eager dispositions in their own Temper, must needs fall off as those natural warmths abate; and at the best they are enclined but in part to Goodness; for, except some few Virtues to which their Complexion determines them,
all

all the rest make but a very faint and cold Impression upon their Minds. And the following such an *Imperius* as this, more than any settled and well-weighed Judgment, I take to be the very Reason, why many Peoples Virtue is so fickle and uncertain, and that they do not so properly forsake, as change their Vices, according to the alterations they feel, in the different Circumstances of their Lives and Constitutions.

But a Sincere Reverence for God, and a Conscientious Respect to our Duty, is of Universal Efficacy. This exalts Nature into Grace, and Wisdom into Religion. This suits all Complexions of Men, and all Conditions of Life ; it meets with our most secret Corruptions, and pursues them into the dark ; it represents an observing Eye, that watches our Closets, and our Beds. None, even the proudest of the Sons of *Adam*, are above its Checks ; and but few, if any, of the most harden'd Wretches are quite past them. 'Tis *This* alone therefore, that must render our Conversations equal, and regular, and always consistent with themselves : For, all that a man possesseth with this

Prin-

Principle hath to do, is to consider what is most agreeable to God's good Pleasure and Direction; to take no Measures from his own Inclinations and Interests, (which was the fatal Error of the Young-man in my Text) but to sacrifice all to the Will and Honour of his God; to keep on his Duty with unshaken Resolutions, Resolutions supported by an humble Confidence, that his pious Endeavours shall be graciously accepted, and abundantly recompensed. Such an Obedience as this is true Religion, and all else is but Intrigue and Design, and therefore such a Confidence as This is true Christian Faith, but upon other Terms it is in no degree better than Boldness and Presumption. For,

2. *Secondly*, No Principle but that of doing our Duty with regard to God, who commanded *it*, can give a man any Title to a Reward hereafter. Our Saviour, in the Sixth of *St. Matthew*, speaking of such as *Give Alms*, and *Pray*, and *Fast*, with a design to be taken notice of, and commended for so doing, tells us with some sort of Solemnity, this is all they are to expect: *Verily,*

ly, I say unto you, they have their Reward. Their Reward ! that is, what they proposed to themselves for the end of such actions when they did them ; and so are to look upon this as full Payment, since they thought the Duties worth undertaking at so low a price. The case is much the same with those that are Temperate meerly for their Health, or Diligent and Just for Reputation and Convenience. A sound Constitution, and a florid Old-age ; Plentiful Fortunes, and Credit, and Countenance in the World, are properly these persons Reward, and all they have any just pretence to : For, there is a great deal of reason to believe, that the Retributions at the last day will proceed upon the same Eternal Rules of Equity, which our Returns to one another are founded upon now. We think our selves obliged, not so much by *Events* as *Intentions*, and that we ought to proportion our *Thanks* accordingly. If a Friend labour sincerely in my Interests, and cannot be successful, his Inclination and Endeavour hath to me the merit of a Performance : But if a man in prosecuting his own Private Advantage, by some pro-

providential turn of Affairs, find it necessary for his own sake to do me a Kindness, I rejoyce in the Benefit indeed, but, strictly speaking, I owe him no Thanks, because my Gain was quite beside his main purpose, and himself was the only person intended to be the better for it. Thus God hath promised to reward the meer Disposition and Good-will to serve Him, tho' our Power of effecting it do not in all points answer our Desires. But the specious Actions of Hypocrites shall meet with no Regard from Him; for, if they did in some degree contribute to his Glory, and the Good of Men, and so may seem to have some colour of a Plea; yet these Effects were occasional and accidental only, with respect to the Doers, and the least part of their Design. Their Avarice, or Vain-glory, or whatever else it were, that moved them to affect such appearances of Virtue, hath received Satisfaction already in this World: And therefore, when they come to demand more Wages in the next, what should hinder the Great Master of the Vineyard from answering Them, as he does the murmuring Labourer in the Parable,

Parable ? Friend, I do thee no wrong ; Didst not thou agree with me for so much ? Take that is thine, and go thy way.

This Third Head well weighed, would furnish us with excellent Rules for the passing a Judgment both upon our own Actions and those of other Men. In our own case, to be exceeding critical and severe, as not contenting our selves with that outward Face of Goodness, which we may know to be but a Disguise, tho' so artificially put on, that the World cannot see through it. In other mens, to shew our selves always Charitable and Tender, as not being able to discern *their* Intentions ; and considering, that even Errors and Miscarriages may sometimes proceed from such an honest and unaffected Simplicity of Mind, as G O D, who sees it, may think fit to allow for ; and therefore it would ill become us, who see it not, rigorously to condemn.

But that which I principally intend from it, with regard to the more immediate occasion, and particular design of my Text, is, to observe of what Consideration the Advantages of the present Life are to the pra-

E ctice

Office of Christianity, and what place they
 deserve in our Affections and Esteem. Plenty,
 and Honour, and Health, and Success in
 our Affairs, are the common and natural Results
 of Justice, and Temperance, and Industry :
 And this condemns our neglect of Duties
 so agreeable every way both to our Reason
 and our Interest. But then, these Blessings
 are not the constant Lot of every Good man,
 nor any where promised to all such in kind :
 and therefore, though we may make them a
 partial and conditional, yet *This* forbids us
 to propose them, for the Only, or the Chief
 End of a Virtuous Conversation. But Eternal
 Life is indented for Expressly, and therefore
This is the only thing worth our aiming at :
 This is what we can depend upon, and all
 the rest are thrown in as overmeasure : *Seek
 the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness*
 first, and after that we are allowed to desire
 and expect, that *all these things shall be
 added unto us*. God hath provided a
 sufficient Recompence for our Pains in another
 World, tho' he should deny us these
 Priviledges of Holiness in the present one :
 So that we must receive these as accessions

sions to the main Heap, and confess it the Abundance of his Grace, if he suffer us to enjoy them ; we are to value them as so many Earnests now paid down, for the encouraging our Duty, and sure Pledges of a more precious Reward hereafter.

IV. There remains yet the Fourth and last Qualification of our Obedience to be consider'd, which is, That a man persevere in *keeping the Commandments*, and (as our Vow in Baptism expresses it) walk in the same all the days of his Life.

And *this* Particular is a necessary consequence of those that went before. For, whatever discouragements can tempt us to fall from our own Stedfastness, are by Them already provided against. The Commands of *God* are (as I have shewn) more strongly recommended by the Pleasures and Priviledges of the Virtues they enjoin, but they do not derive their Binding Power from thence, and therefore all matters of this kind are of a Second and Subordinate Consideration: For, as nothing is a Law to us, meerly for being Profitable or Convenient, so nothing can cease to be a Law to us, by happening to be other-

wife. *G O D* expects we should be obstinately good, and make the inviolable Constancy of our Love for Him and Holiness, give testimony to the Zeal, and to the Truth of it. And,

1. This must needs be required to compleat Mens Obedience at present, because there can be no other sure method of judging of their Integrity. The Force of Natural Conscience, the Probity of the Temper and Inclinations, and the Advantages of Goodness now given in hand, are so powerful, that even very bad men do many commendable things upon these accounts. And again, The Corruptions of Human Nature are so prevalent, its Frailties so many, the Temptations that attack it, so assiduous, and so strong, that good men sometimes feel dreadful Interruptions, and the Lustre of the best Lives is often sullied and eclipsed with dark Blemishes and great Imperfections. Since then in every one there meets such a mixture of Good and Bad, and that no man is either perfectly holy, or exquisitely wicked, without some Allay, it follows, that there can be no safety in pronouncing of any bodys
Vir-

Virtue, any otherwise than from the main scope and constant tenure of the Conversation. For, altho' some Actions of a contrary quality may mingle themselves in the crowd, yet the cool and settled sense of the Soul is sufficiently discerned by mens general design and most usual practice. Thus our Blessed Saviour, in the Parable of the Sower, under the figure of the Stony ground, *which put forth indeed apace, but brought no Fruit to perfection*, rejects that forward and eager Zeal, which serves God by violent heats and impetuous sallies, and then hath its turns of languishing and cooling as fast again : And this ill success he ascribes to *want of Earth*, that is, Serious Consideration, and an establish'd sense of ones Duty. Thus also he compares the man that hears his Sayings, and does them, to a House built upon a Rock, and if the Winds overturn, or the Waves wash him off, this, he tells us, is an Argument he did not stand upon a sound Bottom. All which confirms the necessity of persisting in Goodness, and that Constancy is the only Mark of a man's proceeding upon a firm and truly Religious Principle.

2. The same must be said lastly, for the expectation of a Reward to come; for God hath order'd matters so, that the State in which a man ends his days is what the whole of his Life must be finally determin'd by. When Christians are commanded to *Walk* in God's Laws, this intimates, that they must be continually advancing; that either to *lose ground*, or but to *stand still*, is a Fault. And the Comparisons of a Race, a Fight, and the like, make it plain, that the *Prize* is only for them who come up to the Goal, and the *Triumph* to those that fight it out to the last, and gain a compleat Victory. And sure this is a Method most happy for us, and most reasonable in it self.

Happy for us! for, God help us! what would become of Men, if there were no place left for Repentance, and a Second Thought, *not forgetting and forgoing* the Lusts and Follies of Youth, or the more deliberate Offences of our riper years? Whereas now the Promise of Pardon belongs to a sincere Reformation, let that come when it will: So that if we do but Retract heartily, and in good earnest, we can never be too late.

And

And most reasonable in it self ! For, a Man's last Judgment in Religion, and his last Will in Law, do both alike revoke and disannul all that went before, because they are presumed to proceed upon more mature consideration. And this coming to a better sense of things is the very account God gives of the Equity of his Proceedings, in pardoning Sinners without setting any limits to his Mercy, (Ezek. xviii. 26, 27.) *At what time soever the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness, that he hath committed, and doth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his Soul alive : Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions, therefore he shall surely live, he shall not dye.*

But then it ought to be remembred too, that the same Argument must needs hold as strong, for the Condemnation of all such, as fall into vicious courses after the Benefits of a Religious Education, and the long-continued knowledge and confirmed practice of Virtue. For these men arraign their first Principles of Folly, and renounce all they had done before. They throw up Their part of the Covenant, and by that Act release
God

God of His. And this last perverse Choice defeats and cancels their past Good Works, and loses all the Pains, and all the Fruits of them. As He that is Shipwrack'd in the very Port, perishes there as sure as in the midst of Rocks and Seas, and then the Calamity is but the more Sensible, and the more Disastrous, for coming so late, and undoing so many former Successes.

And, Oh ! that this Consideration may inspire us all with Courage and Holy Resolution, to push on our Fortunes, and pursue every advantage in our Spiritual Warfare ! Always remembring, that the last Engagement determines the whole Controversie; and that they must *be faithful to the end*, who expect to receive a *Crown of Life*. Which Crown God the Righteous Judge bestow upon us all, even for his own Infinite Mercies, and his Son Christ Jesus his sake. *Amen.*

T H E E N D.

